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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 001436

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES UPCOMING LOCAL  
ELECTIONS WITH OPPOSITION CHP LEADER BAYKAL

(U) Classified by Ambassador Eric Edelman. Reason: 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary: In a March 5 meeting, Ambassador solicited main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal's views of March 28 local elections. Throughout the discussion, Baykal attempted to downplay the importance of the elections and seemed resigned to a poor CHP showing. End Summary.

12. (C) During a lengthy monologue on local elections in general, CHP leader Baykal made the following points as he led up to a weak defense of his party's expected poor showing:

-- The GOT is still relatively new to governance, and the electorate will want to give the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) more time;

-- Voting-age Turks, who remember past economic and political crises, will support AKP in the name of stability;

-- Turks will vote not along party lines but for the candidate that seems to be best positioned to deliver more efficient and effective local administration.

-- Turks universally believe that the party in power will be better able to do so, which means many will vote for AKP candidates regardless of their own party affiliation.

-- Results in local elections are, therefore, more often the product of immediate voter needs versus true political preferences.

13. (C) Reflecting on CHP's election strategy, Baykal asserted that on the center-left, CHP is the only viable option. The party has no difficulties on the center-left, he claimed. As part of a national, more long-term strategy, CHP is now turning to center-right voters who are not pleased with the GOT's performance to date. "We are trying to reach out to these voters because we share many of the same values," Baykal said. He further claimed corruption in the GOT and ongoing concern about "national issues" like Cyprus will eventually lead center-right voters to CHP.

14. (C) When pressed about his expectations of CHP's performance in local elections, Baykal dodged, saying the party had no target in mind. He added that CHP "is doing what it thinks it should be doing. We do our best." A clearly resigned Baykal averred that he and the party leadership will surely be criticized -- both from within the party and in the press -- following the local elections. "But we're used to it," he said. In any case, Baykal noted, CHP leadership does not ascribe much importance to local elections, adding that "I don't take them very seriously."  
EDELMAN